

Coventry Leads in Auto Design Innovation

160-year-old Coventry School of Art and Design continues its tradition of excellence by offering Alias StudioTools technology to faculty and students

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Naro project, left and above: Robert Craft, Paul Goldsmith, Lee Robinson, Dan Durrant

Coventry is always striving to lead its students and faculty into the future by providing state-of-the-art facilities and industry-leading tools used by top design experts. For more than 10 years, Coventry has been using Alias StudioTools software.

Walking onto Coventry’s 30-acre campus, one can’t help but notice the juxtaposition of old and new. Modern architecture and ancient ruins don’t compete with each other, but rather co-exist in an exciting state of tradition and innovation. And there couldn’t be a more perfect environment for its School of Art and Design, a place that honors the past while pushing the envelope of futuristic invention. On this unique campus, faculty and staff of the automotive design program work with each other and with industry partners in state-of-the art facilities using only the best tools.

History

The Coventry School of Art and Design began in 1843 with the original purpose of restoring decorative woven silk items. Since then, it has grown to include four broad subject areas, including its famous, award-winning transportation design program. In 2004, Coventry was named Best Design School in the World by the Automotive Design Competition (WADC), which is hosted by the Canadian International Auto Show. For more than 30 years, Coventry has been offering degree-level training in the exciting field of transportation design and has more recently added additional post-graduate study, research and consultancy. Two years ago, the on-campus Advanced Digitising and Modelling Laboratory opened its doors to provide full-sized vehicle design and styling facilities.

Tools and Resources

For more than 10 years, Coventry has been using Alias StudioTools™. Initially the software was used as a research tool, but soon it became an indispensable way of enhancing the Masters students’

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Rajesh Kutty's F1 Amphibious

Coventry School of Art and Design has graduates in every European automotive design studio and several further afield. Many hold senior design positions in such firms as BMW, Mercedes Benz, Ford and Land Rover.

experience. Two years ago it was introduced to second-year students so that by graduation they too would be well-versed and ready for employment in design studios.

“I think it goes without saying that the medium used by graduating car designers has to be that provided by Alias StudioTools. It is both the industry standard and, for us, an essential component in the automotive designer’s toolkit,” explains Mike Tovey, Dean of Coventry School of Art and Design. “Without StudioTools, they won’t even make it to the starting line.”

Over 100 students began learning Alias StudioTools in their second year and will be heading out to the workforce next summer. Faculty expect these students to make a big impact on the industry. “Our results have been better than expected,” says John Owen, principal lecturer at the school. “Our intention is to provide designers with good Alias skills as the norm, and we hope that this first group will break the mould.”

Students

“Car manufacturers are looking for designers who not only have good modelling skills, but also strong design and presentation skills,” says Owen. “We aim to give them that.”

Adrian Sellers, an American studying automotive design at Coventry, looked at various schools and chose Coventry because “the program is more practical rather than theory based.” His strong 3D background led to his leadership role in the Renault “What’s the Next Big Thing?” project. Teams from four schools around the world had to produce both a clay and virtual model with flat work, animations and renderings using Alias StudioTools software. And, they only had 10 weeks in which to do it.

“My experience with StudioTools helped me to visualise things more easily,” says Sellers. “It is probably one of the most versatile tools for design and can easily become a part of your work process.”



Adrian Sellers' Dusk Till Dawn

Charles Drury is another Coventry student who worked on the project. “Using StudioTools lets me express my ideas in 3D without having the craftsmen skill and ability on a physical level. On this project we were able to produce extremely high standards of accuracy using this software.” Drury has an arts background and was able to get up to speed on the technology in a 10-week introductory course.

Owen is in his 15th year of teaching at Coventry and feels very proud of his students’ achievements and their ability to harness today’s tools. He spends a great deal of time ensuring that they have access to the best facilities and software packages.

“We chose StudioTools because we don’t want the software dictating how the form should be. It has three or more ways of doing everything and serves our students ideas without dominating or changing them,” explains Owen. “Other tools seem to make decisions about what should be done without the finesse and accuracy we want.”

The Future

Coventry School of Art and Design continues to strive to be the best design school for years to come. By maintaining existing collaborative projects with the design and manufacturing industries and forging new ones, it continues its tradition of innovation and quality.

“International networking and collaborative design are key ingredients for multinational car companies,” says Dean Tovey. “And we will depend on a whole host of technologies, like Alias StudioTools, for modelling and representing these designs of the future.”

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS

210 King Street East
Toronto, Ontario Canada M5A 1J7
tel 416.362.9181 | www.alias.com/contact
North America toll free 800.447.2542

EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

UK, N. Europe, Middle East & Africa | tel +44.(0)1494.441273
Germany, East & Southeast Europe | tel +49.89.31702-0
France, Spain and Portugal | tel +33.(0)1.44.92.81.60
Italy | tel ++39.039.6340011

ASIA-PACIFIC

Japan | tel +81.0120.765.088
Korea | tel +82.2.6001.3131
Greater China & Taiwan | tel +81.3.5797.3510
South Asia-Pacific | tel +65.6236.2546